

## THE QUR'ANIC ACCOUNT OF JEWS AND CHRISTIANS: EXPOSITORY ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

Jews and Christians are among well illustrated religious communities in the Qur'an. Various religious teachings and belief system of these two communities were elaborated in the Qur'an. They are known in the Qur'an as *ahl al-kitāb* (the People of the Book), the title which demonstrates their lineage to Islam. This paper attempts to examine the status of the Jews and Christians in the Qur'an, and to present the Qur'anic response towards the teachings of these two particular religious faiths.

**Keywords:** Jews, Christians, Qur'anic perspective, exposition and analysis

### Jews and Christians in the Qur'an

According to the Qur'an, Islam and *ahl al-kitāb* (Jews and Christians) originated from a cognate lineage, thus, these three religions are often expressed in the Qur'an as an affinity group who shares inherent similarities. The Qur'an establishes a high degree of kinship among these three faiths, and assigns the Jews and Christians a distinct position which is closer to Islam than any other religious faith. This kinship went to the extent of making the claim that the Muslims are the true inheritors of the authentic heritage of the Biblical prophets.<sup>1</sup> The Qur'an acknowledges that the followers of these two faiths have in fact received revealed scriptures just as the Muslims had.<sup>2</sup> Through Moses, the *banī* Israel received the *Tawrah*, while through Jesus the Naṣārā (followers of Jesus) received the *Injīl*, whilst through Muḥammad (s.a.w) the Muslims received the Qur'an, and these scriptures namely *Tawrah* (Torah), *Injīl* and the Qur'an, all share one source, i.e., Allāh. In addition, same as *Tawrah* and *Injīl*, the Qur'an acknowledges that Ibrahim (Abraham) was a great prophet and one of the founding fathers of monotheism. The Qur'an honors him highly as a true monotheistic patriarch and true monotheist (*ḥanīf*).<sup>3</sup>

Given the fact that these three faiths share such common grounds, the Qur'ānic dietary and matrimonial laws allow intermarriage and other cultural interactions among the followers of the three faiths.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, because of this distinct position assigned to the People of the Book in relation to the Muslims, the Qur'an require Muslims to pursue, in good faith, positive social and cultural relationship with them.

On the other hand, the Qur'an calls on Jews and Christians to renew their faith in Him (Allāh), and to return to the purely monotheistic religion of Ibrāhīm (Abraham), which now takes shape in the faith of Muslims.<sup>5</sup> According to the Qur'an Muslims should extend channels of dialogue to the People of the Book on equal premises (*sawā'in baynanā wabaynakum*); a dialogue in which neither hyperbole nor concealment of truth is allowed.<sup>6</sup> The Qur'an suggests certain guidelines and principles for such dialogue.

*First*, both parties should witness their faith in the form of authentic revelation they have received.<sup>7</sup>

*Second*, such a dialogue among these three communities should be through better approaches and improved communications (*bi allātī hiya aḥsan*) to each other.

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*Third*, such a dialogue should not jeopardize the understanding of the absolute uniqueness of God (*allā na'buda illa Allah*) by compromising with *shirk* (*walā nushrika bihi shay'*).

*Fourth*, in this dialogue all are humanly and equally queued-up in front of God, in a way that no group can claim to have especial relationship with God, nor papal status is granted for some (*walā yatakhidha ba'dunā ba'dan arbaban min dūni Allah*).

However, in the event where the People of the Book turn down the dialogue channels on such principles (*fa in tawallaw*), Muslims should remain resolute to their faith and submit themselves to the Almighty God.<sup>8</sup> Muslims should continue inviting both the Christians and Jews to accept the message of Islam which is similar to that of the *Tawrah* and *Injil*, but different, from these two books, in the sense of it being the final testament (*khātim*).

This final testament describes itself to be the Scripture in Truth (*anzalnā ilayka al-kitāb bi al-ḥaqq*). While confirming the teaching of revealed scriptures that came before it (*muṣādiqan limā bayna yadehi*), this final testament also guards (upholds) the authentic teachings of these two books in safety (*wa muḥayminan 'alayh*).<sup>9</sup> As such, the Qur'an presents itself as the correct account of Mosaic teachings and that of Jesus, before the authentic teachings of these religions were altered by the followers of these two faiths.

### **The taxonomy of the Jews and Christians in the Qur'an**

Though in certain passages, the Qur'an has equally criticized both the Jewish exclusivism and Christian doctrines of Trinity and Papacy,<sup>10</sup> and also accused them to have altered (*taḥrīf*) the Holy Scriptures and concealed or changed the basic teachings of the holy books, yet the Qur'anic taxonomical approach to *ahl al-kitāb* is noticeable. On certain ethical and theological bases the Qur'an categorizes *ahl al-kitāb* into various portions.

*First*, among them are those who adore God and recite the Signs of *Allah*, and prostrate themselves in adoration throughout the night. The Qur'an states: "Not all of them are alike: of the People of the Book are portion that stand for the right: They rehearse the Signs of *Allah* all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration."<sup>11</sup> In terms of faith, this group of *ahl al-kitāb* believes in *Allah* and the Day of Judgment. In addition, in terms of morality, this group holds the universality of moral values, for they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong (*ya'murūna bil ma'rūfi wa yanhowna 'an al-munkar*), and they hasten to perform all good deeds, thus they are indeed ranked among the righteous.<sup>12</sup>

The Qur'an further explains the faith and the moral attitude of this category and mentions that among the basic traits of this group include modesty and humility. This is because, says the Qur'an, when they are approached with the reminder to acknowledge God they would accept and appreciate such reminder, and say: "indeed we have been Muslims (acknowledging and bowing to *Allah's* Will) before this reminder came to us."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, when the revealed verses are recited to them, they would fall down on their faces in humble prostration, and say: "Glory to our Lord! Truly has the promise of our Lord been fulfilled?"<sup>14</sup> The Qur'an states that the good deeds of this group of *ahl al-kitāb* will not be rejected by God. For they have remained true in faith consistently, they will indeed, says the Qur'an, be rewarded by God twice.<sup>15</sup>

*Second*, according to the Qur'an, there is another group of Jews and Christians who have refused to acknowledge the universality of God and the universality of moral

values, and thus categorically adopted the theology of exclusivism. The Qur'an mentions the claim of those amongst the *ahl al-kitāb* who claimed to be the selected community which is closer to God than others, and insisted that they are "His beloved" ones.<sup>16</sup>

In this respect, through the claims of being the chosen communities (*naḥnu abnā' Allāh wa aḥibā uh*),<sup>17</sup> the universal elements of human equality of the Mosaic teachings were eliminated. In the case of the Jews, ethnocentrism had replaced the universal values of equality and justice (*waqālū kūnū hūdan aw naṣārā tahtadū*).<sup>18</sup> While in the case of Christians, theologies of baptism and salvation have placed papacy somewhat higher than the human nature. Thus, both ethnocentrism theology of the Jewish and the Christian theology of papacy and salvation were very much criticized in the Qur'an.

Similarly, the Qur'an associated this group with distortion (*tahrīf*) of the Holy Scriptures, and alteration of its teachings. Among this group are priests and rabbis (*al-aḥbār wa al-rabbaniyyūn*), who had not only concealed many parts of its teachings, but also altered its texts.<sup>19</sup> In the Qur'an, this category of Jews and Christians is also associated with two types of misconducts which are against the true teachings of religion; namely, concealment (*kitmān*) of the basic teachings of the Holy Books and abuse of authority. With regards to the concealment, the Qur'an mentions that there are those rabbis and priests who turn to manipulate and restructure the revelations of God in *Tawrah* and *Injil*, to serve their whims and desires. The Qur'an states:

"There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues: (As they read) you would think it is a part of the Book, but it is no part of the Book; and they say, "That is from Allah," but it is not from Allah. It is they who tell a lie against Allah, and (well) they know it!"<sup>20</sup>

The second immoral practice associated with this group, according to the Qur'an, is the abuse of authority, particularly those in the office of clergy and papacy. Among this category are those who invited the layman to consecrate them (*kūnū Ibādallī*). This group of Jews and Christians has abused their clerical and papal authority by pretending to be the lords (*arbāban min dūni Allāh*), whose words are infallible. Good example of the Qur'anic criticism of misuse of papal office and clergy is to be found in the verses like:

"It is not (possible) that a man, to whom is given the Book, and Wisdom, and the prophetic office, should say to people: Be you my worshippers rather than Allah's: on the contrary (He would say) Be you worshippers of Him Who is truly the Cherisher of all: For ye have taught the Book and ye have studied it earnestly."<sup>21</sup>

The *third* group of *ahl al-kitāb* (Jews and Christians) is those who have subsided into polytheism by associating other deities to God. This group, says the Qur'an, has committed a blasphemy by associating humans to God, by claiming that these humans are sons of God,<sup>22</sup> and therefore committed polytheism. Though Moses and Jesus instructed their followers to worship only one God, this category among the Jews and Christians "take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of *Allāh*."<sup>23</sup> The Qur'an on some occasions advises Muslims to take somewhat tougher stands against this

particular category of Jews and Christians than the mainstream of the Jews and Christians.<sup>24</sup>

### **The faith of *Banī* Israel of Moses**

The Qur'an acknowledges God's revelation to *banī* Israel of Moses, who had received the same monotheistic message given to other prophets of God. According to the Qur'an, like other prophets of Almighty Allah, Moses received the divine and normative statements like: "I am *Allah*, there is no god but I, so worship only Me,"<sup>25</sup> and "O Moses! Verily I am *Allah*, the Lord of the Worlds."<sup>26</sup> On one hand, these Qur'anic statements about Moses, associate him with universal monotheism, and deny racial, national, or ethnocentric understandings of Mosaic monotheism, on the other hand. In the Qur'an, Moses taught the unity of God Who is One, the Creator and the only legitimate Lord of everyone and everybody.

In this understanding, the Mosaic message was a universal antagonism against what the Qur'an identifies as "distortions" of the Unity of God and "violations" of the human rights, committed by some chauvinistic Pharaohs of Egypt at the time of Moses.<sup>27</sup> These Pharaohs, according to the Qur'an, consecrated themselves as gods and claimed divinity for themselves.<sup>28</sup> Moses was then given a monotheistic message to disseminate the true conception of God Who is "One and only One". In the Mosaic mission, God is expressed as *rabb al-'alamīn* or the Lord of the Universe, the Lord of every one and everybody, including *banī* Israel and the Pharaohs of Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

The Qur'an mentions the theological debates that took place between the then powerful ruling elites of Egypt and Moses. At the beginning of the debate, Moses introduces himself as a Messenger of the Universal Lord (*inī rasūlu rabbi al-'ālamīn*), send to disseminate the absolute Unity of Allah and universal justice of man. However, Moses is required by the Pharaohs to explain the content of his message (*wamā rabb al-'ālamīn*).<sup>30</sup> In his explanatory responses to the questions of Pharaohs, Moses never mentioned any ethnocentric notions of God or exclusivism, rather Moses insists that Allāh is One. He is accessible by everybody and responsive to all (*qāla rabu al-samāwāti wa al-ardhi wamā baynahumā inkuntum mūqinīna*).<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, the Qur'an acknowledges that while Moses taught the absolute unity of God, such monotheistic message had faced various resistances from both the ruling elites of Egypt and the layman of Egypt including the *banī* Israel. This is because while the Pharaohs who, because of certain socio-political reasons, resisted the monotheistic faith in Gad and the teachings of human equality brought by Moses, the *banī* Israel resisted the Mosaic monotheism by turning to worshipping man-made idols.

According to Qur'an, after long debate and dialogue between Moses and the then ruling elites of Egypt on various issues related to the unity of God and human equality, Pharaoh (*fīr'awn*)<sup>32</sup> turned-down the Mosaic mission, and rather sanctified himself, claiming that he himself is the legitimate deity (*mā 'alimtu lakum min ilāhin ghayrī*).<sup>33</sup> He publicly announced that he is the Lord, the Most High (*ana rabukum al-'alā*).<sup>34</sup>

With regards to *banī* Israel, the Qur'an mentions some of the liturgical practices of *banī* Israel which violated the true monotheism of Moses. Such liturgical practices include idol worshipping committed by certain groups of *banī* Israel right after they were released from the captivity of the Egyptian Pharaoh,<sup>35</sup> while some others of *banī* Israel venerated an image of a calf.<sup>36</sup> In this regard the Qur'an states: "We took the Children of

Israel (with safety) across the sea. They came upon a people devoted entirely to some idols they had. They said: "O Moses! Fashion for us a god like unto the gods they have."<sup>37</sup> According to the Qur'an, Moses responds to this demand, characterizing it as a violation of true conceptions of Allah, and said: "Shall I seek for you a god other than the (true) Allah, when it is Allah Who hath endowed you with gifts above the nations."<sup>38</sup> However, according to the Qur'an, Moses struggled to correct such idolatry and polytheistic tendencies of *banī* Israel, by teaching *banī* Israel the true conception of God's unity, as well as the differences between the real God and false ones.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the people of Moses made, in his (Moses) absence, out of their ornaments, the image of calf, (for worship).<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, though in the Mosaic teachings, God is presented as transcendental and universal, however, according to the Qur'an, in the later generations of *banī* Israel, these two elements had been altered. The universalism of Mosaic monotheism was replaced with ethnocentrism. Biblical terms like "*sons of God*", and "*beloved or chosen community*" become popular among *banī* Israel after Moses, as if God loves only the Jews exclusively. The Qur'an mentions the claim of the Jews who said that they are the "*sons*" or the "*beloved*" race of God, and thus they are the chosen community who have exclusive relationship with God. Nevertheless, the Qur'an rejects such notion, and states that the entire human race (mankind) can equally access the Grace and Guidance of God, regardless of their ethnicity, while His Forgiveness and Love are for everybody who possesses piety and submission to the Will of God.<sup>41</sup>

As such, according to the Qur'an, Jewish ethnocentrism appeared to the stage of Jewish history in the later generation of *banī* Israel. Thus, biblical teachings with the understandings of exclusivism or the favoured group, the elect or the chosen people, which are related to Mosaic message, have no place in the Qur'anic statements about the religious teachings of Moses.

### **Between *Banī* Israel and the Jews**

Despite the fact that religious beliefs and practices of the Jews are widely presented in the Qur'an, the Qur'an has never used the term Judaism (*yahūdiyyah*).<sup>42</sup> In the Qur'an, to speak about Jews, the terms *banī* Israel (the children of Israel) and *yahūd* (Jews) are employed. The former signifies the early Hebrew community who basically share common ethnic lineage, particularly the followers of Moses, while the later signifies adherents of a religion or culture which is not similar to that of Moses. However, words like Judaism (*yahūdiyyah*)<sup>43</sup> and Hebrew ('*ibri*)<sup>44</sup> had not been used in the Qur'an.

*Banī* Israel is mainly used in the Qur'an, in the occasion of addressing issues related to ethnicity, religious culture and liturgical practices of the early Hebrews, while *yahūd* stands, in the Qur'an, as the Jewish people from the time of Jesus onwards until the time of Prophet Muḥammad (*s.a.w*). The term *yahūd* in the Qur'anic usage denotes a tradition of people who have somewhat abandoned or altered the original Mosaic Law, while *Banī* Israel indicates the early Israelites particularly those who were contemporary to Moses or prior to Mosaic times.

Another significant distinction of these two terms is that, the term *banī* Israel is employed when the positive aspects of the early generations of *banī*-Israel are addressed, while *yahūd* is used in the occasion of narrating the negative attitudes of the later

generations of the Jews, mainly with the issues of textual distortion of the Mosaic laws and concealment of its basic teachings.

With regards to the positive aspects, there are many affirmative presentations about *banī* Israel, especially at the time of Moses. In this regard, the Qur'an states God's alliance with *banī* Israel of Moses,<sup>45</sup> His favours on them,<sup>46</sup> and God's grace on them when He delivered them from the Egyptian bondage.<sup>47</sup> The Qur'anic statements like: "Children of Israel! call to mind the (special) favour which I bestowed upon you, and that I preferred you to all other (for My Message).", "And remember We divided the sea for you and saved you and drowned Pharaoh's people within your very sight," "And remember, We delivered you from the people of Pharaoh," and etc., signify God's grace of Israelites of Moses.

### **Taxonomy of *banī* Israel**

The Qur'an divides them into a few portions; among them are those upright men and women who believe in God and the Day of Judgment, enjoin the good and forbid the evil.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, among the people of Moses there was a bunch of Jews who guide and do justice in the light of truth (*wamin qawmi mūsā ummatun yahdūna bil haqi wabi ya'dilūn*),<sup>49</sup> while there was a group among them with a moderate standpoint.<sup>50</sup> Among the basic characteristics of this category of Jews, according to the Qur'an, include moderation (*minhum ummatun muqtaṣidah*) and justice (*qawmun ya'dilūn*). Hence, "of the good that they do, nothing will be rejected of them",<sup>51</sup> rather they will be rewarded accordingly. Similarly, among the *banī* Israel there are those who can be trusted in business while others cannot.<sup>52</sup> Also there are some others who follow the prophets, while others murder them,<sup>53</sup> and there are others who sharply distinguish themselves from the polytheistic faiths, whilst there are some who worshiped the golden calf.<sup>54</sup>

Among them are those Jews (*yahūd*) who altered the teaching of the divine Scripture or kept it hidden, and thus prevent the public to access it. In some cases this group of Jews, claimed a text which they fabricated as a revelation.<sup>55</sup> This particular group had changed the text of Torah and replaced it with their own words, then claimed that such words came from God, whereas in reality these words are their own. They therefore willfully tell a falsehood against God.<sup>56</sup> The Qur'an associates this particular group of Jews with certain immoral practices, including;

*First*, concealment of the true teachings of the Mosaic faith: "but some of them conceal the truth which they themselves know".<sup>57</sup>

*Second*, distortion and misplacement of the scriptural text and its teachings: "Of the Jews there are those who displace words from their (right) places."<sup>58</sup>

*Third*, fabrication and legislation of forged laws which are not in line with the Mosaic teachings: "Woe to those who write the Book with their own hands, and then say: This is from Allah, to traffic with it for miserable price!"<sup>59</sup>

*Fourth*, forgetful and apathetic behavior towards the correct religious tradition: "But because of their breach of their covenant, We cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard; they change the words from their (right) places and forget a good part of the message that was sent them."<sup>60</sup>

*Fifth*, lies and cheating the layman by misinterpreting the text: "there is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues: (As they read) you would think it

is a part of the Book, but it is no part of the Book; and they say, “that is from Allah”, but it is not from Allah. It is they who tell a lie against Allah, and (well) they know it!”<sup>61</sup>

*Sixth*, murdering prophets: “Is it that whenever there comes to you an apostle with what ye yourselves desire not, ye are puffed up with pride? Some ye called impostors, and others ye slay!”<sup>62</sup>

Finally, besides murdering some of the prophets, the Qur’an mentions that, the Jews have indeed associated with some Prophets all kinds of misconducts such as adultery, cheating and even rebellion to God. The Qur’an rejects such narrations of the Hebrew Bible that associates prophets with certain misconducts. In Islam, Prophets as selected individuals from among their people and they were exceptionally praiseworthy in character and infallible (*ma’sūm*), not involved in any misconducts, wrongs or sins. Otherwise they could not have been Prophets and deserve respect as such from both God and men.<sup>63</sup> In the Qur’an, Prophets are especially known and respected for their integrity, trustworthiness and very strong commitment and dedication to their faith and moral duty. This is because, if indeed they had behaved badly, how was it that they were Prophets at all.<sup>64</sup>

### **Christians (*Nasārā*) in the Qur’ān**

The term *Nasārā* (Nazarene) is used for Christians in the Qur’an,<sup>65</sup> particularly, the followers of Jesus.<sup>66</sup> The Qur’anic word *naṣārā* includes those who followed him during Jesus’ presence on earth and those who believed in his mission after his disappearance. In the Qur’an, the Nazarene (Christians) have through Jesus received a revelation from God, nonetheless, they had forgotten a good part of such message.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, the Qur’an depicts Christians as a humble and modesty group who practice spiritual enhancement (*ruhbāniyyah*). Allah (*s.w.t*) ordained, in the hearts of followers of Jesus, Compassion and Mercy. According to the Qur’an, though Christians invented for themselves Monasticism which was not prescribed by God, however, they did not foster such monasticism as they should have done. Yet God bestowed, on those among them who believed, their (due) reward, but many of them are rebellious transgressors.<sup>68</sup>

With regards to mutual co-existence of religious communities, the Qur’an mentions that Christians are close to Muslims, for they are not arrogant: “and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, “We are Christians”: because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, the Qur’an requires Muslims to establish and maintain relations with Christians by improving channels of communications and religious dialogues with them.

### **The Qur’anic Christology**

The Qur’anic verses about Jesus cover both his mission and his identity. With regards the mission of Jesus, the Qur’an presents it as a “continuation and complementary” to that of the Mosaic Law. Jesus, according to the Qur’an, was a messenger sent to *banī* Israel (*wa rasūlan ilā banī Israel*).<sup>70</sup> The Qur’ān adds that, Jesus come to attest the Law which was revealed to Moses before him (*muṣadiqan limā bayna yadayyā min al-Tawrah*), and to ease certain dietary and matrimonial laws of the Mosaic Law (*wali uḥilla lakum ba’dha alladī ḥurrima ‘alaykum*).<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, the Qur'anic verses about the identity of Jesus and his relation to God could be classified into three categories:

*First* category is the verses in which the nature and identity of Jesus (*Īsā*) are presented and explained.

*Second* category is the verses of the Qur'an in which the denial of the Christian Godhead and Trinity is stated.

*Third* category is the Qur'anic verses in which the distinctive identities of God and Jesus are expressed; where God is an independent and exalted above all creation, and thus the idea of God begotten "son or child" is denounced.

In the first category, the Qur'ān states a wholesome identity of Jesus (*Īsā*). According to these verses Jesus (*Īsā*) is a created man, whose creation was somewhat like that of Adam.<sup>72</sup> He was the son of a woman, Mary, and a word bestowed upon Mary, for he was created by Allah's word 'Be' (*kun*) and he was. He was a spirit proceeding from Allah, but he was not Allah.<sup>73</sup>

He was a humble servant of God.<sup>74</sup> Allah honored him and gave him a revelation, and blessed him wheresoever he is.<sup>75</sup> In this regard, the Qur'an also states the grave utterances of some Jews against Mary, the pious mother of Jesus.<sup>76</sup> Like his pious mother who never claimed to be the mother of God, Jesus never claimed divinity, but presented himself as a pious and virtuous man.<sup>77</sup> Jesus (*maṣīḥ*), in the Qur'an, never expressed disdain to serve and worship Allah, and he, like any other messengers of God, was a man with a mission from Allah and therefore entitled to be honoured like other prophets of God.

He was a Messenger who strived in his life to reform the religious dimensions of the Jewish faith.<sup>78</sup> However, the Jews attempted to kill and crucify him. Nonetheless, such attempt did not succeed, where the Almighty Allah saved him from the crucifixion attempt (*bal rafa'ahu Allāh*). Thus, about the alleged crucifixion of Jesus, the Qur'an states that they neither killed nor crucified him. And those who say so are depending merely on speculations and doubts. Hence, according to the Qur'an, all claims about Jesus' crucifixion is not more than a conjecture and guesswork (*ẓann*). As a matter of fact, says the Qur'an: "they killed him not, but God raised him above all."<sup>79</sup>

In the second category, the Qur'an refutes the idea of the Trinity, and depicts it as a blasphemy about God. In the Qur'an, the Christian Trinity is related to "*ghuluw* or religious excess". In this respect, excesses in religion is understood as the religious attitude by which the believers tend to insert additional elements to the fundamental teachings; additional teachings which are not present in the original scripture. It is the attitude which made the Christians raise Jesus to be part of God. Responding to Trinitarian understanding of God, the Qur'an says that belief in Allah should be without conceiving Him in duality, trinity or plurality of substances or any other multiplicity, for Allah is the only One God, far exalted is He above having a partner or child. The Qur'an states:

O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion:  
Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of  
Mary was (no more than) an apostle of Allah, and His Word,  
which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from  
Him: so believe in Allah and His apostles. Say not "Trinity" :  
desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah. Glory



be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs.<sup>80</sup>

In another chapter the Qur'an states that, conceiving God as "one of three or three in one" is blasphemous and a violation of the true understanding of Allah's unity:

They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One Allah. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them.<sup>81</sup>

In the third category, the Qur'an makes a distinction between Allah and Jesus, where Allah is an Absolute Creator and the Lord of the universe, while Jesus is not more than a creation of God. Jesus' equality to God, the sonship and divinity of Jesus are all repudiated as blasphemies. God is presented here as the absolute and transcendental Lord, Who has no need for a son, spouse or parents. The Qur'an warns the Christians not to exaggerate the position of Jesus by equalizing him with Allāh. This is because Jesus the son of Mary was not more than an apostle of Allah.

With regards to the relation of Jesus to God, the Qur'an states that Jesus was a good and pious man, same like any other good creatures of God. Christ never expressed disdain to serve and worship Allah.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the Qur'an affirms that, Christ the son of Mary was no more than an apostle; many were the apostles that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. He and his mother had both worshipped the Almighty Allah. Thus, those who deify Jesus and say Allah is one of three (as in case of the Christian Trinity), do commit blasphemy, for there is no god except the One and the Only One Lord, Allah.<sup>83</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The People of the Book (Jews and Christians) are addressed as religious faiths that have common lineage with Islam. Apart from their cognate lineage, the Qur'an also allows matrimonial and other social interactions among the communities of these three faiths. However, the Qur'anic criticism of Jewish and Christian faiths, is directed to certain aspects, including Jewish claim of exclusivism, Christian Trinity and Papacy, issues related to Jewish and Christian maltreatment of the revealed Scriptures, and Biblical citations which attribute infallibility to the Prophets. Finally, when dealing with Jewish and Christians, Muslims are advised to bear in mind, two interrelated elements. First, continuation of dialogue channels with the communities of these two faiths. Second, taxonomical approach is always needed to deal with these religious communities.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Qur'an*, *al-An'ām*, 84-90.

<sup>2</sup> Tawrah and Injil were given to Mūsā (Moses) and Jesus, respectively, in the past, and their followers constitute the two communities called in the *Qur'an* as the "People of the Book."

<sup>3</sup> According to the *Qur'an*, Ibrahim was neither Jew nor Christian but rather a monotheistic (*ḥanīf*) who had given himself to God. How could he be a Jew or Christian, say the *Qur'an*, when both terms (Jew and Christ) were instituted after his demise? The *Qur'an* establishes spiritual relationship between followers of Prophet Muhammad (Muslims) and Prophet Ibrahim. Such relationship is principle-guided, not based on ethnicity or kinship. This is to say that Muslims are those who promote the faith of Ibrahim which is based on two principles; first, to have true belief in God (*ḥanīf*), and second, to adhere to moral principles of universal justice and human equality.

<sup>4</sup> *Qur'an*, *al-Mā'idah*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Muslim perceptions of other religions*, edited by Jacques Waardenburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>6</sup> The *Qur'an*, *Āli 'Imrān*, 57.

<sup>7</sup> The *Qur'an*, *al-'Ankabūt*, 45.

<sup>8</sup> The *Qur'an*, *Āli 'Imrān*, 57.

<sup>9</sup> Besides the confirmation (*muṣādiqan*) and superintendence (*muḥayminan*), the *Qur'an* also contains the revelations that were kept hidden or deliberately misplaced by the People of the Book. The *Qur'an*, *al-Mā'idah*, 15-20, 44 and 48.

<sup>10</sup> The *Qur'an*, *al-Baqarah*, 111-113, 135.

<sup>11</sup> The *Qur'an*, *Āli 'Imrān*, 113-115.

<sup>12</sup> The *Qur'an*, *Āli 'Imrān*, 114.

<sup>13</sup> The *Qur'an*, *al-'Ankabūt*, 52-54.

<sup>14</sup> The *Qur'an*, *al-Isrā'*, 107.

<sup>15</sup> The *Qur'an*, *al-Baqarah*, 115 and *al-'Ankabūt*, 54.

<sup>16</sup> However, the *Qur'an* responds to them and says the truth of the matter is that, God is for all and: "You (Jews and Christians) are but men, of the men He has created," thus salvation is for every good person, while punishment is for those who commit mischief on earth. The *Qur'an*, *al-Mā'idah*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> The *Qur'an*, *al-Mā'idah*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> The *Qur'an*, *al-Baqarah*, 135.

<sup>19</sup> According to the *Qur'an*, such distortions (*taḥrīf*) of the holy books are tantamount to serious violation of the covenant (*mithāq*) between God and the communities of these faiths, as stated in the Hebrew Bible.

The covenant clearly prescribes, says the Qur'an, upon the followers of these two faiths to demonstrate the scriptural truth, and also to conceal none of the textual facts. The Qur'an states: "And remember *Allah* took a covenant from the People of the Book, to make it known and clear to mankind, and not to hide it; but they threw it away behind their backs, and purchased with it some miserable gain! And vile was the bargain they made." The *Qur'ān, Āli 'Imrān*, 187.

<sup>20</sup> The *Qur'an, Āla 'Imrān*, 78.

<sup>21</sup> The *Qur'ān, Āla 'Imrān*, 79.

<sup>22</sup> The Qur'an mentions that a group of Jews consecrated Ezra as the son of God, while Jesus is understood as the son of God by the Christians.

<sup>23</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Tawbah*, 30-33.

<sup>24</sup> Such measures include that they should submit to the Muslim rule and their religious activities among the Muslim community should also be limited.

<sup>25</sup> *Qur'ān, Tā-hā*, 14, and *al-Qaṣaṣ*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> *Qur'ān, al-Naml*, 9.

<sup>27</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Qaṣaṣ*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Qaṣaṣ*, 38.

<sup>29</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Shu'arā*, 16.

<sup>30</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Shu'arā*, 10-30.

<sup>31</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Shu'arā*, 24.

<sup>32</sup> He is called Ramses the Great and some times Ramses II. He was the third king of the 19th dynasty of Egypt. Historians believe Ramses II to have ruled Egypt during 1279-1213 BCE. In addition to his wars with the Hittites and Libyans, he was known for his extensive building programs and for the many colossal statues of him found all over Egypt. The Qur'ān never mentioned the name Ramses, but rather used the term Pharaoh to speak about this dynasty.

<sup>33</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Qaṣaṣ*, 38.

<sup>34</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Nāzi'āt*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-A'rāf*, 148.

<sup>36</sup> The *Qur'ān, Tā-hā*, 88-9.

<sup>37</sup> The *Qur'an, al-A'rāf*, 138.

<sup>38</sup> The *Qur'an, al-A'rāf*, 140.

<sup>39</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-A'rāf*, 138-141, and 148-149 and *Tā-hā*, 86-91.

<sup>40</sup> The *Qur'ān al-A'rāf*, 148).

<sup>41</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Mā'idah*, 18.

<sup>42</sup> The term Judaism (*yahūdiyyah*) which includes the totality of the scriptural teachings of the Jewish law and belief, and the human interpretation as well as the Jewish practice of its teachings, never appears in the Qur'an, but the words like, Jew (*yahūd*) and *banī*Israel are employed in the Qur'an.

<sup>43</sup> Judaism is the religion of the Jews, tracing its origins to Abraham and having its spiritual and ethical principles embodied chiefly in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Talmud. .

<sup>44</sup> Biblical text employs this word for descendant of the Semitic people claiming descent from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

<sup>45</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Baqarah*, 41-64.

<sup>46</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Baqarah*, 47 and 122.

<sup>47</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Baqarah*, 49, and *Ibrāhīm*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> The *Qur'ān, Āli 'Imrān*, 114.

<sup>49</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-A'rāf*, 159.

<sup>50</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Mā'idah*, 66.

<sup>51</sup> The *Qur'ān, Āla 'Imrān*, 115.

<sup>52</sup> The *Qur'ān, Āli Imrān*, 74-77.

<sup>53</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Baqarah*, 78 and 91.

<sup>54</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-A'rāf*, 152.

<sup>55</sup> The *Qur'ān, al-Baqarah*, 79 and *Āli 'Imrān*, 78.

<sup>56</sup> The *Qur'ān, Āli 'Imrān*, 78.

<sup>57</sup> The *Qur'an, al-Baqarah*, 146.

<sup>58</sup> The *Qur'ān al-Nasā*, 146.

<sup>59</sup> The *Qur'an, al-Baqarah*, 79.

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<sup>60</sup> The Qur'ān, *al-Nasā'*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> The Qur'ān, *Āli 'Imrān*, 78.

<sup>62</sup> The Qur'ān *al-Baqarah*, 87.

<sup>63</sup> Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Understanding Islam*, 24.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> In the New Testament the term Nazarene is employed to Jesus, alluding to his home town, Nazareth. It is a town of southeast of Haifa, settled in prehistoric times. It is first mentioned in the New Testament as the boyhood home of Jesus. While in the later Christian generations it was applied to those who followed his teachings.<sup>65</sup> However, among the Jews, the term referred to Jewish sect of "observants," or "devotees," and in the medieval ages the term Nazarene was applied to a Syrian Judeo-Christian sect of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

<sup>66</sup> Muslim commentators of the Qur'an have different opinion about the derivative of the word *naṣārā*. Commentators like al-Zamakhshary (d. 1143 C.E.) argues the word is derived from the Arabic root of *naṣārā* (to assist), and the reason is because followers of Jesus assisted him to convey his mission to others. Others like al-Razi (d.1209 C.E.) hold that the word is derived from the name of the town called *nasirah*, where Jesus spent some of his childhood times. Conceptually, the term is employed in the Qur'an as a generic name for the followers of Jesus. Al-Zamakhshary, Mahmud b. Omer, *Al-Kashāf 'an Ḥaq'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl*, (Cairo: Dar al-Rayān lil al-Turāth, 1987), v.1, p.146, al-Rāzī, Imām Muḥamed Fakhruddīn, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, (Cairo: al-Matba'ah al-Miṣriyyah, 1935), v.9, pp.183-184.

<sup>67</sup> For this reason, the Qur'an presents itself to the Christians as a perspicuous Book which would guide its followers to the ways of peace and safety. The *Qur'ān, al-Mā'idah*, 15-16.

<sup>68</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *al-Ḥadīd*, 27.

<sup>69</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *al-Mā'idah*, 82.

<sup>70</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *Āli 'Imrān*, 49.

<sup>71</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *Āli 'Imrān*, 50.

<sup>72</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *Āli 'Imrān*, 45, and 59. Maryam, 16-34.

<sup>73</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *Āli 'Imrān*, 59. *Al-Nisā'*, 171.

<sup>74</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *al-Nisā'*, 172. Maryam, 30. *Al-Zukhruf*, 59.

<sup>75</sup> The *Qur'ān*, Maryam, 30-31.

<sup>76</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *al-Nisā'*, 156.

<sup>77</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *al-Mā'idah*, 75.

<sup>78</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *Āli 'Imrān*, 50.

<sup>79</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *al-Nisā'*, 157-158.

<sup>80</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *al-Nisā'*, 171.

<sup>81</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *al-Mā'idah*, 73.

<sup>82</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *al-Nisā'*, 171-172.

<sup>83</sup> The *Qur'ān*, *al-Nisā'*, 73-75.